THE WORLD.

NUMBER CXXXIV.

By *ADAM FITZ-ADAM.*

To be continued every THURSDAY.

THURSDAY, *July* the 24th, 1755.

IN a former paper I attempted to prove that the laws muſt be general, not particular, which GOD employs in the government of mankind. Let us now examine a little particularly the nature of the complaints which theſe laws occaſion, and conſider how far the exiſtence of a Providence is rendered precarious by them.

WE lament that happineſs and miſery are very irregularly diſtributed among the good and bad: and yet, as it has been well obſerved, are by no means determined in queſtions, very neceſſary to be preciſely ſettled, before

before we form this concluſion: as, what is the final and proper happineſs of man? And who are the good, and who the bad, that deſerve to partake of it, or to be excluded from it? He is not a good man at Rome, who is a good man at London. Nay, in the ſame country, this ſect adores him as a ſaint, whom another proclaims a miniſter of darkneſs. The patriot of one party, is the rebel of the oppoſite one. The happineſs then or miſery of ſuch a perſon becomes very frequently, at the ſame time, and in the ſame place, both an argument for the belief, and rejection of a Providence.

AGAIN, the greateſt part of the misfortunes which afflict us, are concluded to ariſe from the action of general laws; when, in reality, they proceed from our own wilful oppoſition to them, and refuſal to accept them as the meaſure of our conduct. Obſcure and limited as human reaſon is, it is ſufficient to diſcover to us certain deſirable ends, and certain means fitted to produce them: ends not to be procured by the application of different means, and means not adapted to procure different ends. Phyſical cauſes produce phyſical, and moral cauſes moral effects. It is ſurely unreaſonable to invert this order, and expect moral effects from phyſical cauſes, and phyſical effects from moral cauſes. It is unreaſonable to expect, that the virtues of a ſaint or martyr will ſecure us from the dangers of a well or precipice, if we advance to them with a bandage over our eyes. We ſhould ſmile at the country gentleman's ſimplicity, who diſbelieved a Providence, becauſe fox-hunting, port and tobacco were incapable of inſpiring him with the genius of Milton, or becauſe he was unfurniſhed with the ſagacity and penetration of Locke, after a dozen years attendance to every debate at the

quarter

quarter ſeſſions. The epicure would be entitled to as little ſerious treatment, who embraced the ſame atheiſtical tenet, becauſe his ſtreams did not flow with burgundy and champagne, or becauſe haunches of veniſon, turtles and turbots did not riſe as ſpontaneouſly from his hot beds as muſhrooms. We ſhould treat ſuch characters with ridicule; but are other leſs ridiculous, who expect effects as diſproportionate to their cauſes, as thoſe juſt deſcribed? Should the wiſe and good complain that they are not rich and robuſt like particular wicked men; the reply is obvious: the means that procure wiſdom and virtue are very different from thoſe that procure health and riches. Do they lament that they are not in poſſeſſion of thoſe external advantages, when they have neglected the natural methods of acquiring them, which perſons leſs valuable have purſued with ſucceſs? It is no objection againſt a Providence, that men do not gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thiſtles; they have reaſon to be ſatisfied, while it is in their power to receive them from the plants proper to their production.

Let it be allowed that on ſome occaſions, with all our precaution, the order of nature may operate to our diſadvantage: the torrent may overwhelm, the flame conſume, or the earthquake ſwallow us: but are general laws to be condemned, becauſe in particular inſtances they give us tranſient pain, or even determine our preſent ſtate of being, which they have contributed to preſerve in every period of it, and on which not only our happineſs, but our very exiſtence has depended? It is a neceſſary condition of a compounded ſubſtance, like the material part of man, to be ſubject to diſſolution, from cauſes exterior to it, or united with it's conſtitution. Does a more convincing argument ariſe againſt a Providence

dence from it's diſſolution at one ſeaſon rather than another? or from it's diſſolution by an external, rather than an internal cauſe, which is as effectual to the end, though leſs precipitate in the means?

SOME few caſes (much fewer than are generally imagined) may poſſibly be ſtated, where in the preſent life, the moment of miſery to a faultleſs creature may exceedingly overbalance the moment of it's happineſs: as when it is introduced into being with infirmities of body, too obſtinate for temperance and diſcipline to correct, and which render it inſenſible to every enjoyment. But to ſolve theſe appearances, a well-ſupported revelation, that inſtructs us in the doctrine of a future ſtate, may fitly be applied: for though revelation cannot ſerve as a baſis to natural religion, on which it is only a ſuperſtructure, yet it may be extremely uſeful to reconcile the ſeeming inconſiſtencies of a ſyſtem, diſcovered to be good by arguments of another kind; and reaſon will acquieſce in the truths it teaches, as agreeable to her own dictates.

AFTER premiſing theſe reflections, I may venture to make public the following letter from a very learned female correſpondent.

MR. FITZ-ADAM,

IT has been ſome ſurprize to me, that in a paper which ſeems deſigned to correct our judgments, and reduce the influence of faſhion, folly, prejudice and paſſion, you have never confuted a principle, which is a compoſition of them all. I mean the belief of a Providence. It anſwers indeed no individual purpoſe, except to countenance the inſolence of our parſons, who maintain it in defiance of the wiſdom of their ſuperiors. I was early initiated in that *firſt philoſophy*, which explained the creation

creation by a fortuitous concourſe of atoms. An infinite number of particles, varied in ſhape, ſize and colour, and embracing each other in all poſſible poſitions, opened a ſcene as entertaining to my fancy as it was intelligible to my underſtanding. My brother was an able advocate for this opinion; and his ſituation in a goal, under the preſſure of ill-health, loſs of fortune, reputation and friends, furniſhed him with copious arguments to ſupport it. A maiden aunt, indeed, who had the management of my education, was perpetually repreſenting his principles as impious, and his arguments for them as abſurd. She inſiſted that his misfortunes could fairly be aſcribed to no other cauſe than himſelf. That loſs of reputation and friends was the natural conſequence of a want of common honeſty; loſs of fortune of extravagance; and loſs of health of debauchery. I am aſhamed to confeſs that theſe childiſh reaſons had too much weight with me, and that I continued too long in a fluctuating ſtate between truth and error. I thank God however, that my own misfortunes have taken off the partial bias from my mind, and opened it to conviction and the reaſon of things. My beauty impaired, if not loſt by the ſmall pox, the death of a favourite child, the ſcantineſs of my circumſtances, and the brutality of my huſband, have proved beyond exception, that no moral Being preſides over us. I ſhall not trouble you with a repetition of the ſame nonſenſe employed againſt me, as before againſt my brother, by the ſame ancient lady. She concluded with obſerving, that complaints of circumſtances and the brutality of a huſband came with an indifferent grace from a perſon, who, after rejecting ſo many advantageous offers, eſcaped from a window with a ſtranger ſhe had ſcarcely ſeen. You

will